

BOUNDARY

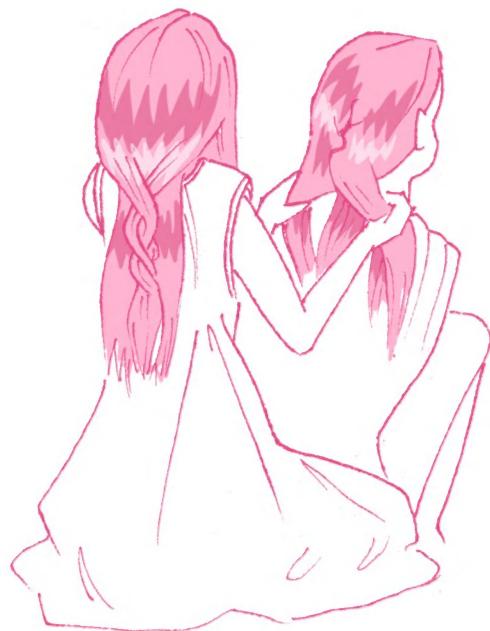




**There's a joke about boys who get too close to one another.
They stray too far into intimacy, cross some line,
reveal themselves as something other.**

The boundary between boy and boy is a solid thing.

But girls wear their guidelines differently.



Girlhood defines itself by its intimacy.

**We stray into
each other's space.**



We overlap.

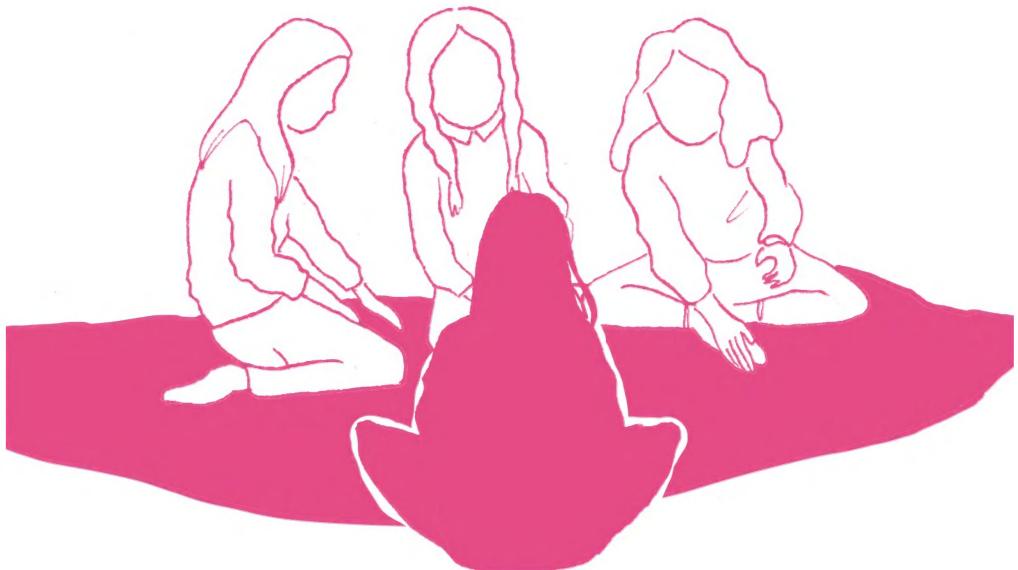


**Growing up, I couldn't trust that intimacy.
Not when that girlhood closeness stirred shame
and panic in me I was too young to understand.**

**Seeing no boundaries, I forced boundaries on myself.
I drew police tape around me because I knew
my actions needed to be policed at all times.**

I didn't understand why yet, but I knew.

I remember the mistake I made.

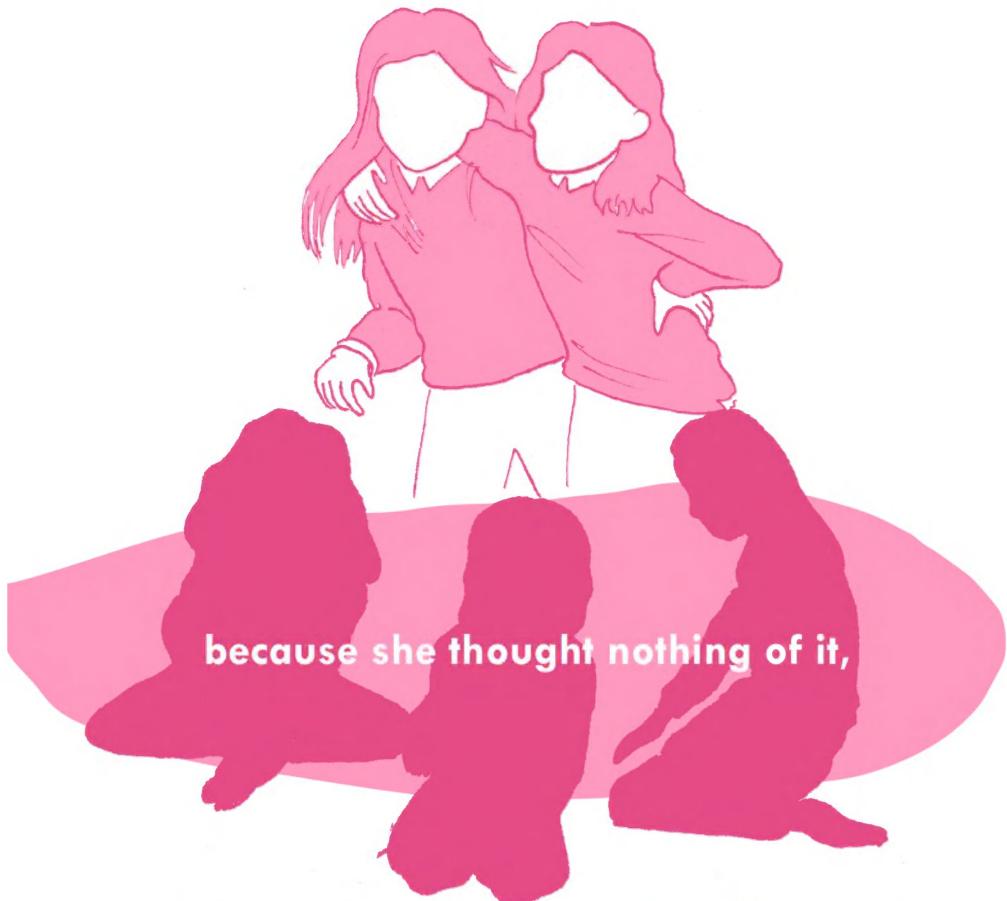


**I remember my friend - blushing, giggling -
telling us the story of a boy who tried to
kiss her on the cheek.**

And then,

because she wanted to demonstrate,

because I was nearest,



She leaned in to kiss me as he had kissed her.

**And, like an alarm triggered by a trip wire,
my instinct kicked in.**

I pulled away.

And that's how they knew.



By holding back, I had strayed too far.

My friends had seen me mark a boundary between
myself and them, and all of us knew then,
without understanding what,
that something wasn't a secret any more.

**And no one ever said anything.
No one ever acknowledged what had changed.**

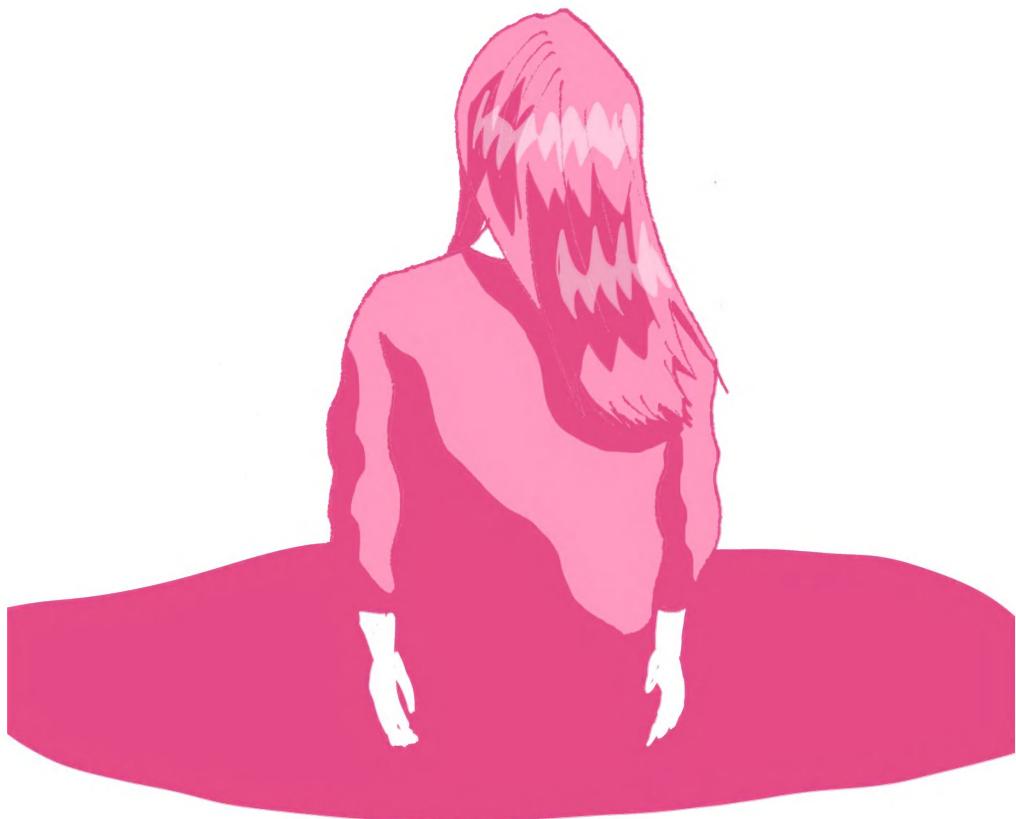
**But I caught them, every now and again, glancing at me
out of the corner of an eye, with something not as cruel
as suspicion, but not as kind as concern.**

**Looking back at me over their shoulders
as they began to grow and change**



**and take their places
in the world.**

leaving me in their wake to scramble after them,
tripping,
stumbling,
scraping my elbows and knees,



but never quite falling...

...one way,



or the other.



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